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ABSTRACT

The development of a positive self concept through various art forms provides the foundation for an exploratory course presented to a group of enrollees in the New Careers Program. The students, whose work is here presented, are receiving on-the-job training in child development centers while receiving classroom instruction to prepare them as preschool assistant teachers. The New Careers Program seeks to create a category of jobs in the human service field which will provide a "career" ladder through which individuals of low income and minimal education can progress from an entry level position up to a professional rank if educational requirements are met. Exercises centering on the creative arts can be designed to modify the self concept and self esteem of students. The quality of the environment provides the raw materials upon which children can project themselves: art, poetry, dramatics, and choice of books. Genuine liking and respect for children is considered shown by offering such opportunities for the development of individuality. (Author/JM)

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SELF
AWARENESS
THROUGH
THE
CREATIVE
ARTS

by
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Introduction

The development of the child's intellect is an activity which begins with direct experience through the senses and involves the emotions. Through the creative arts, sensory development in children can be nurtured to provide the foundation for self awareness and ultimately intellectual growth. Self expression through the creative arts is a form of positive reinforcement which creates confidence and self-fulfillment. The development of a positive self concept through various art forms provided the foundation for an exploratory course presented to a group of enrolees in the New Careers program. The students, whose work is presented in the following pages, are receiving on-the-job training in child development centers while receiving classroom instruction to prepare them as pre-school assistant teachers.

The New Careers program seeks to create a category of jobs in the human service field which will provide a "career" ladder through which individuals of low income and minimal education can progress from an entry level position up to a professional rank if the educational requirements are met.

Participants

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Positive Self Image

It is essential that a program for young children be concerned with the way a child feels about himself. It has come to be recognized that the way a child perceives himself influences the way he will behave. If he sees himself as unattractive, a failure, or rejected by society, he will tend to behave that way.

What is needed for the presence of good self image are: friends, the respect and acceptance of others, experiencing success in undertakings, the love and admiration of family, independence, and the feeling of control over oneself and others. Now, educators can bring about a restructuring of the child's picture of himself by meeting these needs. Several studies (Long, 1968, Carpenter & Burse, 1969) cite research evidence showing that black children have a lower self concept than white children and that it gets worse as the child progresses through the "middle class" school system.

The self concept comes out of the past, and is used to predict the future. In the beginning it is a "reflected" self—it reflects how others feel. These actions and feelings of others are soon internalized by the young child, and he comes to feel about himself as he perceives how others feel about him. Self concept theory is particularly helpful in understanding minority group children. Low self-esteem, conscious self-hatred and ambivalence are probabilities for those who experience discrimination and who are treated by the majority as being in low social status. Such children need to see themselves and their ethnic groups in a realistic, positive light and to use their self-confidence in an atmosphere which encourages this. If the child can have healthy, satisfying experiences in school, he will come to view himself as a competent successful person. When an environment is provided which enables the child to explore, to spend the time he wishes at the task he enjoys, to express himself without threat, and to find materials of various levels of difficulty so that he can select those which lead to success, a climate is provided in which he can reveal himself, get to know himself better; and hence, an environment for healthy growth.

The quality of the environment also provides the raw materials upon which children can project themselves; art, poetry, dramatics and choice of books. We show our genuine liking and respect for children by offering such opportunities for the development of individuality.

Visual Imagery

The arts have a vital role in child development in the opportunity they provide for defining and understanding the self.

The art symbol expresses ideas about feelings; it embodies subjective experience which is affective as well as cognitive. The images which children express in art forms involve what is personally significant to them. This personal significance has an affective (child's image of himself) as well as cognitive (intellectual development) character. There should be a quality of cumulativeness about the experiences we make available to children. This cumulative quality helps children to savor the quality of an experience in order to express its affective aspects.

It is through the provision and supplementing of experience with read and written stories, told and experienced with various media of representation, that a teacher can foster the artistic development and achieve the affective goals. These experiences should contribute to a understanding, a refinement of affective life and to the development of an aesthetic sensibility. As these feelings are brought to each new experience, the outcome of that experience passes through the filter of self-feelings and in time adds to the already existing concept of the self in a positive manner.

The following exercises focus on the objective of developing a positive self-image through the creative arts. The feeling side of our mental life equally needs cultivation: means of communication through language and the arts provide the expression, use and control of feeling and response.

The Visual Self

Many children do not have an awareness of themselves. They do not know if they are short or tall, thin or fat, or what their hair looks like.

On a roll of 36-inch wide wrapping paper, each child lay down in order that his outline is drawn. With paint, the child proceeds to create himself as he is or as he would like to be.

The Silhouette

This exercise permits the child an opportunity to see himself in another dimension.

A 12-inch by 24-inch sheet of paper is tacked to the wall. A slide projector can be used to cast a ray of light on the sheet of paper. The child sits in front of the paper directly in line with the projected light and his facial outline is drawn directly on the paper. It can then be cut and mounted.

Sensory Awareness

The environment in which we live transmits an abundant amount of visual information. Psychologists state that each child differs in their need for visual stimulation in order to attain a state of personal satisfaction.

Sensory experiences precede and form the basis for later abilities of the child to comprehend and manipulate abstract symbols. The young child tends to learn through his body and to sense and feel rather than think his way through experiences. The patterning and intensity of stimulation helps the child build up the basic mass of intimate organic experience which may contribute to the efficacy of learning and help to shape cognitive functioning. This can occur by orienting the child to the sensory modes of learning and discrimination.

A child should learn to use all his senses; visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile and olfactory stimuli should be present. The fact that stimuli are the raw materials of thinking, implies that successful stimulation will give rise to a train of ideas and consequently that language and manipulative activity will follow. It is insufficient to present stimuli without providing the child with an opportunity to respond.

If a child is to learn to process information, he must use his senses to gain information. The teacher's task then is to provide a variety of stimulation and to insure that the child is made aware. Sensory experiences through visual media provide a language through color, line, form and shape, to express emotions and feelings without use of words. This is another form of communication through a different language which promises to expand the child's perceptual awareness and increase his range of sensory experiences.

By exploring the granular differences of various surfaces, the child can begin to associate textures to objects. Textural discrimination can provide clues towards the comprehension of our everyday physical environment as well as help to develop another sense modality. The "feel" of a surface, whether coarse or smooth, can transmit messages of caution or delight and enable the development of a visual vocabulary which will permit the child to communicate to himself as well as others at many different levels.

Textural Awareness

This exercise is designed to sharpen the tactile and visual sensitivity of children by making them aware of the variety of textures in their immediate environment. Once the participants are provided with newsprint paper and graphite sticks, they can place their paper upon different surfaces and use their graphite sticks to rub over the paper. Surfaces within the classroom as well as those out-of-doors are desirable, such as wall surfaces, signs, floor surfaces and the like. The rubbings can then be mounted as a collage on mural size wrapping paper.



Collaborative Art

Is it enough that young children have the isolated experience of composing a piece of music, or painting a pleasant picture or weaving a piece of cloth. In one sense, yes; each new achievement is its own reward. In another, no. A child lives as a member of a social group in a certain physical environment. He has to learn to develop relationships; to come to terms with people and things. This relationship with parents and his brothers and sisters helps in time to cope with strangers. The bed in which he sleeps, the carpet on which he crawls, the chair in which he sits, are early experiences in a life long process of accommodating himself to aspects of the environment that are either familiar or terrifyingly strange. Children develop themselves in the process of developing a relationship with their environment. When they work and play in groups, they are learning to live with other people; and in literature and drama, they are extending these relationships. These group experiences can be further extended into an experience called "collaborative art." This is simply defined as sensibility for all, creativity of all. The process of creating has traditionally been an isolated, individual experience.

Collaborative Art

The following experiment indicates that art can be a collective or group experience, each person contributing and developing new interpersonal relationships with each other and their environment.

A 24" x 32" poster board was divided into six sections and each section was limited to a particular subject matter as follows:

1. straight lines
2. circles
3. squares and rectangles
4. mixed geometries
5. numbers and letters
6. free

Each individual participated in each section following his own design but considering the subject matter of each section. The participants could extend other ideas or originate their own. The participants spent a total of three hours at work until they felt satisfied that the group experience was complete. The idea of a collective art experience supports and expands the theory of the concept of self by including instead of excluding friendship and by creating an environment of expanded friendship and sensitizing participants toward individual differences.

Mental Maps

Representation is the means by which human beings organize their experience of the world in order to further their understanding of it. Representation requires symbols. Imagery is the way of symbolizing the world and language is another.

To foster children's representational ability, which in turn will determine the content of their expressions, we need to provide the conditions that lead to a rich image which results not only from the quantity of experiences, but also from their quality. They need not only a wide spectrum of experiences, but also a sequence of experiences we make available to children which leads to depth and comprehension as well as variety of imagery.

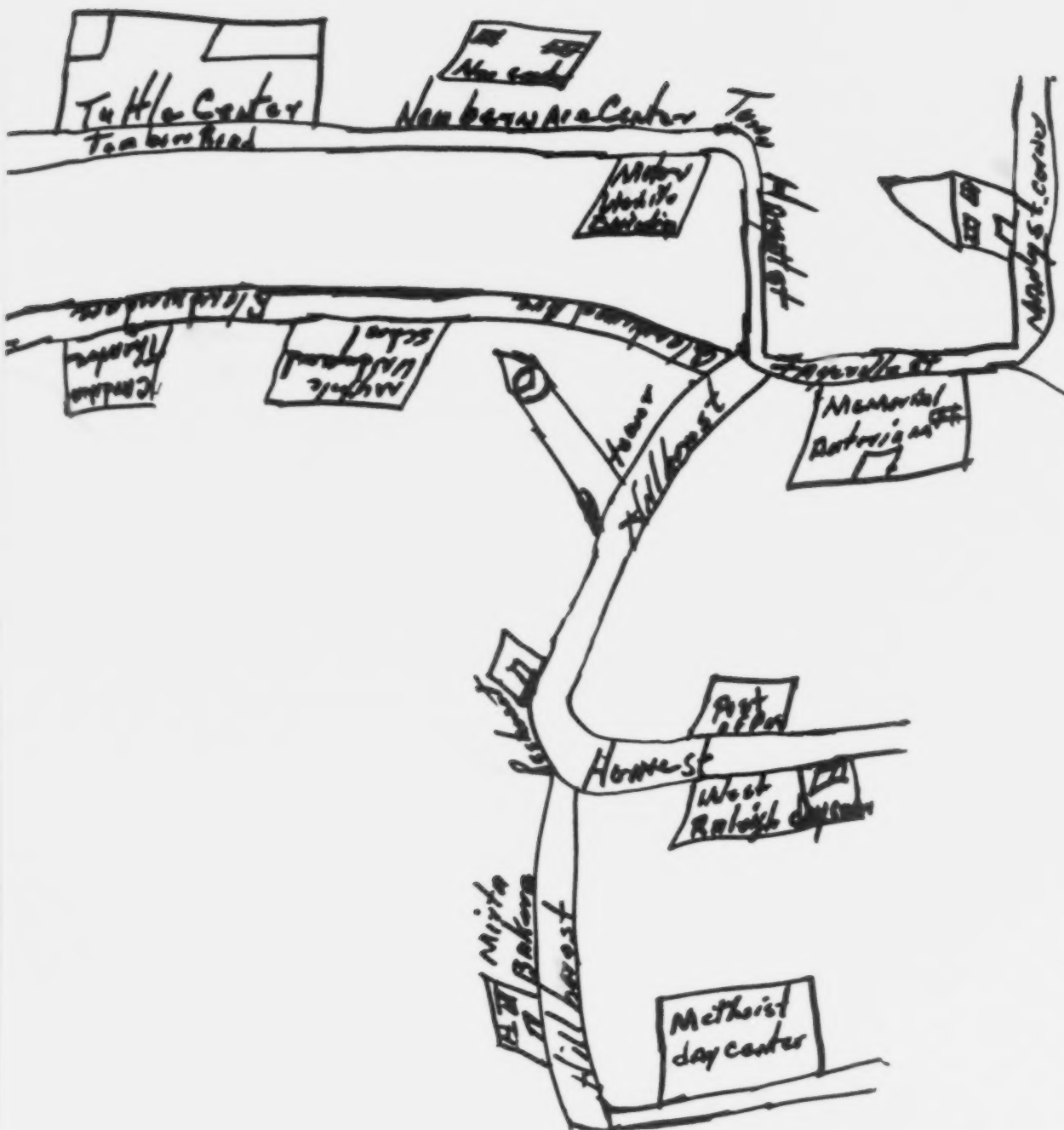
Through the first school years, children's paintings and drawings show increasing coordination of imagery. These changing characteristics are related to a child's conceptual development. Representation thus gradually becomes not simply a question of imagery, but rather of images which inhere within certain relationships, including spatial relationships that are increasingly understood and reproduced in a child's expression.

One method for developing the child's conception of space is through "subjective maps." The mental associations or cues in the environment can best be visualized through a mapping technique since spatial relations are difficult to verbalize. Graphic representations too, provide insights into certain pictures of the environment which seem to be emphasized or obscured, as well as describe these features spatially or texturally. Comprehension of the everyday physical environment varies from child to child, however, perceptual awareness can be nurtured through experiences which require association, organization and recall into a classification called a mental map. Maps can generally employ "spatial" elements where buildings or landmarks are depicted, or "sequential" elements which are primarily roadways. The most successful maps employ characteristics of both, however, familiarity with the settings will influence the degree of accuracy and use of spatial elements.

Subjective Map

In the following exercise in mental mapping, the students are requested to map the five development centers they represented in the context of the city of Raleigh. The maps were to indicate the features of the city, such as landmarks, buildings, street names and other indicators that would clearly describe the five settings.

This exercise is an attempt to make the student consciously aware of the processes and skills involved in the communication of ideas requiring graphic representation. It also attempts to show how people relate to different parts of the city and how they place themselves within it.



Language Development

The early childhood years are the root years for language development. Many kinds of thought are intimately linked with and dependent upon language. Language is one mode of sensory stimulation which is vital to curiosity while it nurtures perception. The child should be talked to about his world and should be encouraged to talk about it in order that he may recall experiences just after they have occurred.

Reading is an extension of language development. Language is grounded in and develops out of personal experience, enabling an individual to codify, clarify and extend his understanding of objects, situations and relationships. A child must himself see the purpose in reading and find that his personal experience is illuminated or extended thereby. A child who is linguistically handicapped will require a greater emphasis placed upon the development of oral language. He needs help in developing his self-expression, for its development cannot occur unassisted. The capacity for using language in an imaginative manner is a major part of cognitive functioning.

Thus language becomes a highly efficient method of storing and recalling information for problem solving. It is a useful tool for organizing and structuring data.

A young child's free exploration and manipulation of materials and ideas offers the teacher many opportunities to enhance children's language in a meaningful and creative context.

Poetry makes an important contribution towards children's language development by introducing new words in context. Imaginative use of words catch children's attention by their sound which in turn leads to an interest in words themselves. Poetry heightens this awareness and opens the possibility of creating new words. It can help children discover new depths in everyday experiences.

Poetry

The following exercise provided the opportunity for experimentation with words and thoughts. The students were read several poems from the following sources:

Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle
 Selections from Ogden Nash
 Time for Poetry

They were then asked to write a poem using the theme, "I wish." The only constraint was that the poem not rhyme and each line should begin with "I wish."

This exercise can provide the students of young children with the special opportunity of introducing poetry to the children they work with.

The verbal exercises on the word "black" were created to stimulate positive meanings and depth through language. One exercise, based on the word black and its positive identity, was to write an allegorical tale.

Poetry, too, was explored as an expression of the writers' thoughts and moods in a personal way in an attempt to attribute new meaning and importance to experience.

How to Eat a Poem

by Eve Merriam

Don't be polite.
 Bite in.
 Pick it up with your fingers and lick the juice
 that may run down your chin.
 It is ready and ripe not, whenever you are.

You do not need a knife or fork or spoon
 or plate or napkin or tablecloth.

For there is no core
 or stem
 or rind
 or pit
 or seed
 or skin
 to throw away

I Wish

I wish I was a witch
to do magic.

I wish there was a time
I could be far away.

I wish there was a time
I could be on time.

I wish
I wish
many times

I wish a million that all things
was
mine.

I wish I wish I was a star
I wish I wish I was up there
I wish I wish
I wish I could fly
I wish a million years go by.

I wish the darkness night to come
I wish
I was a falling star.

I wish today no sorrow
 I wish tomorrow no rain
 I wish yesterday could have been more beautiful
 (it was the day of happiness)
 I wish that I could have beautiful weather
 every day of my life.

I wish that there could be an end to hate
 I wish all men could know the joys of love
 I wish that brotherhood ruled o'er the land
 I wish that peace could take the place of war.

I wish the rain would stop for awhile.
 I wish to look out the window and once
 more see sunshine.

I wish to walk on the ground again
 and not hear
 swoosh
 swoosh
 swoosh
 around me

I wish for the heavenly blue of the skies
 I wish for the beauty of
 fair weather that can never die.

I wish to be a good teacher
 I wish to teach children to see
 beauty in everything.

I wish to help them see
 the beautiful colors of the
 flowers and trees,
 also the insects and birds
 Some are red, green, gold and blue.

I wish to read many stories
 to them,
 and by so doing let them
 visit children mother lands.

I wish to help them enjoy
 each day by playing games
 with them.

I wish to try and understand
 each child
 as an individual person.

I wish I could remember where I was
 before I was

I wish I knew who the kind person was
 who decided that I'd be me

I wish he'd left his address so I
 could write or call sometimes

I wish I'd come here as smart as I am now

So I would not have to wish
 and wish
 and wish
 and wish
 this.

Black

"I am black! And I like black
things.

I like black shoes.

Do you?

I have a black shoulder bag.

Does your mother have one, too?

When I want to be alone, I will
find myself a black corner,
or a black room to sit in.

Maybe you feel this way
sometimes.

Have you ever walked down
a black street at night and
listened to some of the sounds
you can hear on a black night?

Some night before you go to
sleep; look out of your
window. Tell me, what did you see?

Did it make you feel and say to yourself
that

"Black is beautiful."

A Twilight Tale

Long ago, when there were only a few hundred people on earth, there was no twilight time. The sky would be light for a while and suddenly become black. When this happened the only things that could be seen were the moon and a few stars. The people were unhappy because the sky changed that way. The sudden change frightened the children. Because they were afraid of the dark, the sudden change sent them into hysterics. No one knew what could be done to solve the problem.

One day, a kind, good man got an idea. The man, called Mr. Magician thought he could solve the problem because he could do all kinds of magic. He decided that he would cast a spell at darkness. The spell would make one half of the sky light and the other half dark. That day, just before darkness, Mr. Magician whispered a magic chant.

FROM WHITE TO SUDDEN BLACK OUR WORLD HAS BEEN
DIVIDE YOURSELF SO BOTH MAY BE SEEN

All of a sudden, half of the sky was white and the other half black. The people were astounded by the miracle. They were all joyful, but only for a short time. The light side of the earth and sky soon became overcrowded because there was not enough room for everyone. Because of these cluttered conditions, the people began to fight and argue among themselves. Mr. Magician became sad and disgusted because the people acted in this manner. He got so angry that the next period before darkness he whispered a second chant:

SKY OF BLACK
BE NO MORE
BE COMPLETELY WHITE
SO OUR FOLK WON'T BE SORE

The sky became all white and darkness never came. You may think that the people were completely satisfied, but they were not. A number of them became irritable and groggy because the bright sky hindered their rest. Mr. Magician did not know how to please all the people. He went home and thought some more. He said, "The people of earth were dissatisfied with light then blackness, they fought over who would live on the light and dark sides of earth, they cannot rest now that the sky is permanently light, so I'll make the sky completely black. For the third time he chanted:

WHITE SKY
BRIGHT SKY DISAPPEAR
IN YOUR PLACE
SEND BLACKNESS HERE

The sky became completely black, and just as before the children were frightened and never played outside. The adults could see nothing because there was no electric lights or any other ways of lighting. Mr. Magician grew depressed and dissatisfied with himself because three times he had tried and three times he had failed. He again thought and worried until he fell asleep and had a strange dream.

He dreamed that the sky was once again half white and half black. Suddenly both halves began to move and combine to make the sky a brilliant, beautiful, blue grey.

Mr. Magician woke up instantly. He then tried to think of a spell that would make his dream come true. After deep meditation he said, "I will cast a spell that will make the sky light for a while, so earth's people can see. This while I will call day. Secondly I will make the sky blue-grey and call it twilight, since it will be a combination of light and darkness. Last I will make the sky gradually become dark, so earth's people can sleep."

For the forth time the magician chanted:

FROM LIGHT TO DARKNESS WAS NOT A SUCCESS
ALL LIGHT AND ALL DARK WAS NOT LIKED BEST
HALF LIGHT AND HALF DARK CAUSED MAN TO FIGHT
IT IS TIME FOR YOU, BLACK AND WHITE, TO UNITE

Mr. Magician clapped his hands and the black and white portions of the sky slowly came together and formed the beautiful blue-grey one he had dreamed of.

After Mr. Magician saw that his spell had been successful and all of the people on earth were pleased, he met with them. At the meeting they decided to divide the day into twenty-four, sixty minute hours, the light portion day, the part between light and dark twilight, and the darkness, night.

To this day, the earth's people are content and twilight is always between day and night.

Linda Wright

Black is Beautiful

A black boy with a kite
 running across the meadow
 with his black dog chasing the wind

Black is beautiful.

A black sky at night with
 the stars shining so bright—without
 the black sky the stars would not shine so bright.

Black is beautiful.

Black voices all sing together in
 black harmony. Black is beautiful.

The deep black lagoon whispering
 untold secret is beautiful.

Black is beautiful.

Black

Black is a face that smiles at me
and seems to say "hello" in so many ways.

Black is the color of the night. Black is a
face that says good night.

How can I hate black when that's the color
of our skin? Whether it's deep or thin.

Black is beautiful.

Black is the color of so many faces

Some are not always full of smiles

Some are sad! When you look at me and
say black is beautiful

Then I'm glad, glad, glad.

Black

Black is the night when the moon is not showing.

Black is cats making scary noises outside.

Black is the objects we see when the sun is shining bright.

Black is children playing.

Black is beautiful.

Black is a hair style worn by many.

Black may be a dress or shoes or bag.

Black can be the color of someone's skin.

Black is beautiful.

Strange Mixture

On a lonely shelf all beautiful and gay,
a jar of black paint was put to stay.

A week later, red, white and blue moved in,
and teased the black paint with their
terrible grins.

The black paint got tired of their laughing bag
so on red, white and blue he pulled a gag.

He flipped his lid, and they flipped theirs,
and he spurted black paint all in the other jars.

Red became maroon.

Blue became navy.

White became gray.

And to this day
because of their laughing and teasing kicks
red, white, blue and black are made to mix.

Group Prose

The concept of group art can be further extended into collaborative prose and poetry. This cumulative experience creates an environment which stimulates the senses and intensifies the developing ability to symbolize both visually and verbally. Children have an inclination to discover and explore. They find pleasure in satisfying this desire and as a result it is self-perpetuating. The best source for the development of language and imagery is direct experience. The experiments in collaborative prose attempt to draw from the students immediate experiences in a group of topics that have visual as well as verbal connotations. The participants were requested to write at least one statement about each of the following topics:

- On children
- Working with children
- On learning
- Why I want to teach
- On being black
- Love

On Children

Children are the best of everything. For me, I wouldn't put anything past them. Wouldn't let anything come past them or for them.

Children are life.

Children are the greatest of God's miracles.

Children are one of the seven wonders of the world.

Children are future adults, so teach them while they are young.

Children are the best thing that could happen to a person.
Children are just beautiful. Period.

Working With Children

I love it. It's good for helping the children and to help the grown ups, too. So I really think it's great.

Working with children enables one to return to childhood.

Children need to be taught.

Children are a new amazing experience everyday.

Children never cease to amaze me.

Children are fun to be with.

Working with children you learn something and they learn something.

Working with children helps them to learn their mistakes and yours.

On Learning

Learning is everything. Without it we couldn't make it
because we have got to learn to get around.

Learning is to strive to be somebody—even yourself.

Learning is the storage of material in the memory bank.

Learning is the key to peace.

Learning is happiness.

Learning is helping them to learn.

Learning is helping each other learn.

Learning is the key to all things.

Learning will create love.

Learning is communication with others.

Learning is writing your name the right way:

Ynaffit

Tiffany.

Why I Want to Teach

It helps me to learn more.

I want to teach because it will give me the opportunity
to give a part of myself to those that I teach.

To help instill happiness in children.

To help the children learn.

To help the children learn, and understand the world
in which we live.

To help someone learn my thoughts and to learn theirs.

I like to be around children and share my love with
those that really need it.

On Being Black

I am proud of being black but just don't want to
get any blacker. I love it because it's me, and I love me,
myself, and I.

Being black is an opportunity given to a chosen few.

Black is the color of one of God's favorite children.
To be black is a feeling that no other race will ever know.

In some ways we are all black. In some ways, black is
beautiful.

Black is one of the eight colors.
Being black is something no one can take away.

Love

Love is everything. Without it, I don't think the
world could make it in some places.

Love is giving of ones self, expecting little in return.
Love and understanding will eventually bring about peace.
Love is wonder. Without it your are lost.
Love is loving one another.
Love is the greatest of all gifts.
Love is something that you giveth away.
Love is something that everybody needs.

"The child is curious. He wants to make sense out of things, find out how things work, gain competence and control over himself and his environment, do what he can see other people doing. He is open, receptive and perceptive. He does not shut himself off from the strange, confused, complicated world around him. He observes it closely and sharply and tries to take it all in. He is experimental. He does not merely observe the world around him, but tastes it, touches it, hefts it, bends it, breaks it. To find out how reality works, he works on it. He is bold. He is not afraid of making mistakes. And he is patient. he can tolerate an extraordinary amount of uncertainty, confusion, ignorance and suspense. He does not have to have instant meaning in any new situation. He is willing and able to wait for meaning to come to him—even if it comes very slowly, which it usually does."

John Holt
"How Children Learn"

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